



**KONAMI OFFICIAL COMIC BOOK**

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

# METAL GEAR SOLID®

Written by  
**KRIS OPRISKO**

Artwork by  
**ASHLEY WOOD**

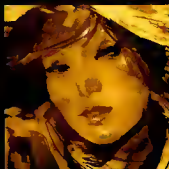


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**KONAMI**

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WAIT?



MOVES SO  
FAST!

AND  
APPARENTLY  
ISN'T KEEN TO  
STICK AROUND  
EITHER.

WHO THE  
HELL?

WUUGGH...

BAKER,  
CAN YOU  
TALK?

WHO ARE  
YOU?

I'M NOT  
ONE OF  
THEM

OH I GET IT  
JIM SENT YOU  
YOU'RE FROM THE  
PENTAGON

THE DARPA  
CHIEF TOLD ME  
HE GAVE THEM HIS  
DETONATION CODE.  
WHAT ABOUT  
YOURS?



I...  
TALKED.

WHAT?! NOW  
THE TERRORISTS  
HAVE BOTH CODES.  
THEY CAN LAUNCH  
ANYTIME!

IT'S NOT LIKE I DIDN'T FIGHT.  
I MANAGED TO RESIST PSYCHO  
MANTIS'S MIND PROBE.

"HE COULDN'T READ  
YOU? WHY NOT?"

SURGICAL  
IMPLANTS IN  
MY BRAIN  
EVERYONE WHO  
KNOWS THE  
CODES HAS  
THEM

EVEN  
THE DARPA  
CHIEF?

OF  
COURSE.

BUT  
ANDERSON  
SAID MANTIS  
GOT HIS CODE  
BY READING  
HIS MIND...





SO HOW  
*DID* THEY  
GET YOUR  
CODE?

~KOFF~  
I NEVER HAD  
ANY TRAINING ON  
~KOFF KOFF~  
HOW TO RESIST  
TORTURE.

ANYWAY THE  
TERRORISTS HAVE  
**BOTH** CODES NOW  
DO YOU STILL HAVE  
THE **CARD KEYS**  
TO **OVERRIDE** THE  
DETONATION  
CODE?


NO, NOT  
ANYMORE...

"I GAVE THAT FEMALE SOLDIER  
THE KEY, I HOPE SHE'S OK."

"I'M SURE SHE IS, SHE'S GREEN...  
BUT AS TOUGH AS THEY COME."

TELL ME...  
IF THE KEYS DON'T  
WORK, IS THERE ANY  
**OTHER** WAY TO  
PREVENT A MISSILE  
LAUNCH?

YOU NEED  
TO FIND HAL  
**EMMERICH**, HE'S  
THE **TEAM**  
**LEADER** OF THE  
METAL GEAR REX  
PROJECT.



IF THERE'S ANYONE WHO CAN  
FIGURE OUT HOW TO STOP METAL  
GEAR FROM LAUNCHING, IT'S HIM

"HE'S PROBABLY BEING HELD  
IN THE NUCLEAR WARHEAD  
STORAGE BUILDING."

"THERE'S ONE THING I  
STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND...  
WHY REVIVE THE METAL  
GEAR PROJECT AT ALL?"

"BECAUSE WE LIVE IN  
AN AGE WHEN ANY  
SMALL COUNTRY CAN  
HAVE A NUCLEAR  
WEAPONS PROGRAM."

YOU SEE,  
COMPLETE NUCLEAR  
DISARMAMENT IS AN  
IMPOSSIBILITY

TO MAINTAIN  
OUR OWN POLICY  
OF DETERRENCE WE  
NEED A WEAPON OF  
OVERWHELMING  
POWER.

MADNESS...

THIS IS  
WHAT YOU  
CAME FOR,  
RIGHT? THE  
OPTICAL  
DISC?





IT'S ALL  
HERE... THE  
ONLY REMAINING  
COPY OF THE  
DATA COLLECTED  
FROM THE METAL  
GEAR REX  
EXERCISE

I DON'T  
KNOW WHAT  
YOU'RE...

I *KNOW* YOU  
WERE SENT TO  
GET THIS. MAKE  
SURE YOU REPORT  
THIS TO JIM...  
YOUR *BOSS*.

LOOK, I GET  
MY ORDERS FROM  
COL. CAMPBELL  
AND...

LISTEN YOU'VE  
*GOT* TO STOP THEM  
IF IT GOES PUBLIC, MY  
COMPANY AND I  
ARE... *FINISHED*

WHY? DOESN'T  
METAL GEAR USE  
CURRENTLY EXISTING  
TECHNOLOGY?

METAL  
GEAR *ITSELF*  
DOES, BUT...  
~KOFF KOFF~  
~KOFF~



THOSE  
PENTAGON...  
BASTARDS  
WENT AND...  
DID IT.

WHAT ARE  
YOU TALKING  
ABOUT?

THEY...  
THEY'RE JUST...  
USING YOU  
FOR...

ARRRGH!!





HELLO. DO  
YOU READ ME?  
YOU'RE THE  
COLONEL'S  
NIECE, *MERYL*.  
RIGHT?

AND  
WHO ARE  
YOU?

SOME  
PEOPLE CALL  
ME *SOLID*  
*SNAKE*.

THE LEGENDARY  
*SOLID SNAKE*? SORRY  
ABOUT BEFORE... I  
WASN'T SURE IF YOU  
WERE ONE OF THE  
*BAD GUYS*.

WHAT *IS* THIS  
PLACE? I DON'T THINK  
IT'S *JUST* A NUCLEAR  
WEAPONS DISPOSAL  
FACILITY...

BOY,  
(NOBODY TOLD  
YOU ANYTHING,  
DID THEY?)

THIS PLACE  
ISN'T *REALLY* FOR  
DISPOSING NUKES—IT'S  
OWNED AND OPERATED BY  
AN *ARMSTECH DUMMY*  
CORPORATION.

THIS IS  
A *CIVILIAN*  
BASE?!



RIGHT. FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF  
METAL GEAR THIS WAS  
TO BE A FINAL TEST  
BEFORE THE FORMAL  
ADOPTION OF THE  
PROGRAM.

HMMMM....  
SOUNDS KINDA  
FISHY.

DO YOU  
KNOW THE PERSON  
WHO DESIGNED  
METAL GEAR—  
DR. EMMERICH?

YEAH.  
HE SHOULD BE  
IN THE RESEARCH  
LAB OF THE NUCLEAR  
WARHEAD STORAGE  
BUILDING TO THE  
NORTH.


GOT IT. IF WE  
CAN'T OVERRIDE  
THE DETONATION  
CODE IN TIME I  
NEED TO ASK HIM  
HOW TO DESTROY  
METAL GEAR.

YOU PLAN  
TO TAKE THAT  
THING ON BY  
YOURSELF?!

IT  
WOULDN'T BE  
THE FIRST  
TIME...

WELL,  
I'VE GOT TO  
GO SAVE THE  
DOCTOR. YOU  
SHOULD  
GO...

I'M  
GOING WITH  
YOU.



NO WAY.  
YOU'RE STILL TOO  
GREEN, FOR NOW.  
JUST THINK ABOUT  
KEEPING YOURSELF  
ALIVE... AND STAY  
THE HELL OUT OF  
MY WAY.

YOU'RE A  
REAL **BASTARD**  
JUST LIKE MY  
UNCLE SAID

OK SNAKE...  
I'LL BE A GOOD  
GIRL. I'LL OPEN THE  
**CARGO DOOR** IN  
THE TANK HANGAR  
TO EASE YOUR  
WAY



GOOD. WE'LL  
LINK UP AFTER I  
GRAB **EMMERICH**  
HANG ON TO THE  
DETONATION  
OVERRIDE KEY  
UNTIL THEN



cargo door





PATIENCE,  
LITTLE ONE,  
I KNOW YOUR  
HUNGER IS  
GREAT...





COME  
LITTLE ONE  
TIME IS  
SHORT

THE BOSS  
SAYS HE IS A  
FORMIDABLE  
FIGHTER, BUT HE  
HAS YET TO  
FACE THE LIKES  
OF ME.



OK,  
CARGO  
DOOR'S  
OPEN.

THANKS.  
WHERE ARE  
YOU?

WHERE I CAN SEE  
YA. DON'T WORRY, I'M  
STILL DISGUISED IN AN  
ENEMY UNIFORM.



BE CAREFUL.  
IT'S EQUIPPED WITH  
INFRARED SENSORS.  
IF AN INTRUDER IS  
DETECTED, GAS IS  
RELEASED. WE'LL MEET  
AT THE STORAGE  
BUILDING.



WAIT!  
YOU SAID  
YOU'D STAY  
PUT!



I  
CHANGED  
MY MIND



WHRRRRRRR





GO NORTH  
FROM THERE  
I'LL GO AHEAD  
AND WAIT  
FOR YOU

MERYL...  
DON'T DO  
ANYTHING  
STUPID

BEET-NEE-EE-BOOP

WHAT THE...  
A **NON-BURST**  
TRANSMISSION?

SNAKE...  
BE CAREFUL.  
THERE ARE CLAYMORE  
MINES AROUND THERE.  
MAKE SURE TO USE A  
MINE DETECTOR OR  
YOUR MISSION WILL  
END QUICKLY.

WHO ARE  
YOU?

ONE OF YOUR...  
FANS. JUST CALL ME  
"DEEPTHROAT."

HE'S GONE...  
WHOEVER HE  
WAS. GOOD  
INTEL. THOUGH  
THIS PLACE IS  
LITTERED WITH  
CLAYMORES

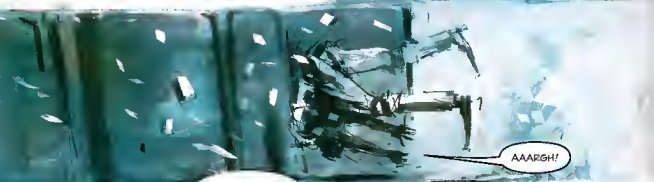




RUMBLE



THIS IS RAVEN'S  
TERRITORY—SNAKES  
DON'T BELONG IN  
ALASKA. I WILL NOT  
LET YOU PASS.



AAARGH!

HA HA HA!  
THAT'S RIGHT—  
YOU SHOULD CRAWL  
ON THE GROUND  
LIKE THE SNAKE  
YOU ARE!





YOU  
KEEP HIM  
OFF-GUARD WITH  
THE MACHINE  
GUN.

BUT LEAVE  
THE KILLING  
TO ME!

BOOM!



THAT'S IT,  
SNAKE. CLOSER.  
CLOSER.



TARGET RANGE 120m  
ELEVATION 16%

GOT  
YOU.

>>>> LOADING <<<<



KAROOM

HA HA HA HA HA!

# F L I G H T

Kelly Sue DeConnick

Ed Boone arrived half an hour late for dinner. In the early years of their marriage—before the boy had become what he was—Carol made sure he was always on time. It was a little game they played; she would secretly set his watch ahead, or give him false start times for movies or dinner dates, or whatever. He'd arrive apologetic and out of breath, only to find that the opera or the meeting that he was sure he had missed was just getting ready to start. How she was able to intuit exactly how late he'd be running for any given event, he'd never know. But the deft hand with which she'd managed his tardiness and really, every aspect of their home life, filled him with wonder and awe.

She met him at the door in oven mitts. "I'm just getting the roast out," she said, instead of "Hello." Half an hour late and right on time. She'd done it again. These weekly dinners, prescribed by their family therapist, always began with a lump in Ed Boone's throat.

...

Carol Boone moved the garlic mashed potatoes around her plate and tried to think of something to say that wouldn't start a fight. They'd been a communicative couple, open-minded and adventurous. They'd been vegetarians for 16 years, ferchissake. They collected art. They'd smoked pot and dropped acid. (In her weaker moments, she wondered if it wasn't the acid that did it, but she hated herself for even entertaining the thought because it implied there was something wrong with her son. He wasn't defective, she told herself, just different.) And now they sat across from one another, chewing silently and looking at their plates.

"Garlic mashed potatoes," Ed chuckled. Carol sighed. "Grow up."

"Well, Hell. Must be some reason he won't sit at the table..."

"He doesn't want to sit with you, Ed."

"Me? What did I do?"

"We've been through this..."

"Well, we're just going to have to go through it again because I can't make a damned bit of sense of—"

"He's our son. And he thinks you're ashamed of him for what he is."

"I am ashamed of him!" Ed exploded. "I gave him—no, WE gave him—every opportunity and what's he done with it? What kind of life has he made for himself? He spends 12 hours a day holed up in that pit of a basement—"

"His lair," Carol corrected him.

"Oh-my-fucking-god. This is not a lifestyle choice, Carol, it's a phase. And I am just about ready for it to end! I mean, Jesus, he spends 12 hours a day holed up in his lair—under our roof, eating our food and talking to God-knows-who on that fucking computer that we paid for—"

"He has a job."

"Yes, yes, he does. He has a job because Rick Sanders felt sorry for me and he offered to let my fuck-up kid ride the register at his Stop 'n Rob as a favor. Do you know how pathetic you have to be to use family connections to get a job at a convenience store? And our boy is probably going to squander that career opportunity because he pisses and moans every time he has to work a day shift and he goes in dressed like Stevie Nicks."

"Oh, now you're gonna make fun of the gays, too?"

"Goddamn it, Carol, Stevie Nicks isn't gay! She's a woman!"

"What? And women can't be gay?"

"That is not the point and you know it! You used to have a sense of humor."

"And you used to have a social conscience!"

"I don't even know why I'm here. I can't talk to you."

"Oh, you can talk! But you won't LISTEN!"

...

Bradley Boone put down the game controller and dove for his headphones. He flipped his lustrous black hair behind his shoulders as he elapped the two padded speakers tight over his ears. Each was the size of a coconut. They were ergonomic, stereophonic, ludicrously expensive and entirely goofy-looking, but they blocked out the shouting like a lead window blocks out light and he'd saved for three months to have some measure of control over what he had to hear. It wasn't like any girl ever saw him in them anyway.

He popped in a CD—an Icelandic band that sounded like steel wool feels—took a deep breath and hit the reset button. Three hours to kill before The Bank opens, that's four more games at least.

"Restoration is salvation," he mouthed to himself. The restart was his favorite part of the game; he hadn't messed anything up yet. The possibility still existed of doing everything right each time. He closed his Kohl-rimmed eyes and made an effort to be the music. This time, he thought, this time I'm in the zone. He cocked his virtual shotgun and prepared to slaughter zombies in time with the black metal dirges of his dour Nordic brethren.

...

Amy Applebee was pixie-small and impossibly fair. The light skin bit was right, but the blonde hair didn't help her look the part. It ought to have been darker, she thought. And thicker, somehow. And "Amy Applebee" was an unfortunate name for a Creature of the Night. Maybe she was supposed to have changed it after the transformation? Lilith? Or Mistress Somebody-or-Other. Mistress Melancholia? It wasn't like they'd issued her a fucking handbook. No, "Amy Applebee" had served her well in her early years and it would serve her for the next... however many. Frankly, she dated them to make fun. Go ahead. Take your best shot, Lady Lucretia. I'll rip your fucking throat out and pulp your brains till I can use the goo for hair gel.

"I need to see some ID, please." The doorman stirred her from her reverie. She rummaged through her enormous satchel, looking for her ID.

I wonder if this counts as irony, she thought as she handed the card over.

He stared at it for two long seconds then smirked and performed some kind of bouncer-voodoo-sleight-of-hand that ended with her ID held between the tips of his index and middle fingers like a cigarette. "You look a lot younger, Amy," he said, and he winked as she snatched it back.

"Yeah, I get that a lot." Amy Applebee blushed as she ducked inside the



velvet-draped after-hours club known as The Bank and she would curse herself for it for the next half an hour. This clown sure as shit better be worth it, she thought. Blind dates are a bitch, even for the undead.

\* \* \*

Father Fang was so X'd up he had super-vision. He could see microscopic bugs moving in mega-pixel patterns like fractals on the dance floor. He could see the faintest glimmer of resentment in the eyes of his ex-girlfriend as she tried to tend bar in a corset. He could see the souls of chaitis. Most intiguingly, he could see the hot little blonde number who'd been paired in a booth against the far wall for the last half an hour. She drew a cigarette from a pack, not a case. How gauche, he thought. But he could also see the nipples of her perky little underage tits through her tight t-shirt, so Father Fang generously found it in his heart to forgive her for her tobacco accessory gaffe. He gripped his silver dragonhead lighter tightly and set his psy-vamp phaser on "seduce." Then, he began his long, slow saunter across the dance floor.

Please do not let that be him, please do not let that be him, Amy begged the universe as she caught sight of the frilly-frocked pop oozing in her direction. She drew the privacy curtain nearly closed, hoping he'd get the hint.

"May I?" he asked when he reached her, whipping the drapery aside and producing a flame.

"I'm already lit," she said, blowing as much smoke in his face as she could without leaning in. He'd taken forever to cross the floor.

"Spunky," he observed. "I like that."

"Great," Amy sighed. "Because I live for your approval."

"Seriously, dude," she continued. "I'm waiting for someone, okay? Move along."

"We ate all waiting for some... one," he said, "and I have been waiting a lifetime for you, my crimson swan." With that, Father Fang chuckled and reached out to stroke her cheek. Before he could touch her, though, his crimson swan's jaw opened like an anaconda. Her teeth—heretofore unremarkable—extended out from her mouth in a densely packed arrangement of deadly stalactites. They must have been three inches long, easily, and Father Fang, in his altered state, found himself admiring them

tremendously and wondering who'd made them, and what she'd paid for them, and how it was that the little blonde's set made his own custom-crafted sterling silver Nosferatus look cheap by comparison. Also, he could see his reflection across the expanse of wet and white enamel and he thought he was looking sharp.

Amy snatched his body up by the neck with one hand and snapped the velvet curtain closed with the other. Her voice deepened and took on a stereo quality as she laid him out across the table, breaking his legs when he kicked at the curtain.

"GIVE US A KISS, FUCK!" Amy hissed in her weird vibrato, and with a pinch from her thumb and index finger she crushed Father Fang's larynx to keep him from screaming as she ripped the flesh off his face.

\* \* \*

Bradley Boone stared at himself in the mirror and wondered if he had time to wash his face and start over. He hadn't quite mastered eyeliner yet and the "hyper-real" foundation that he'd purchased to cover his zits and give his skin that otherworldly glow never went on quite right. He ended up looking more greasy than glowing and the zits on his chin weren't so much covered as they were sculpted in a manner not unlike the way a potter works with clay over an armature. He undid what damage he could with a warm washcloth and then, figuring it was dark in The Bank anyway, started digging around for a pair of clean socks. He glanced up at the clock. The good news was that his dad would have gone back to his apartment by now, and his mom, having had her nightly visit from Ernest and Julio Gallo, would be fast asleep. The bad news was that he only had ten minutes to get to the bus stop. He settled for a pair of socks that were mostly clean.

\* \* \*

Amy Applebee had learned very early on in her internet goth-boy experiment never to go anywhere without her portable hand-held wet/dry vac. Sure, it meant carrying a hobo bag half the size of her person, but it made for easy clean-up if she dribbled while she ate. She also carried a small box of baby wipes, a couple of heavy-duty contractor-grade trash bags and a bondage-style leather

facemask just as naturally as she used to carry lipstick and lotion.

The basic clean-up was easy—after the heart stopped, the blood seeped more than it sprayed. She vacuumed up what she didn't eat, cauterized the remaining wounds with silver nitrate and zipped the leather slave mask over his head to hide the carnage. She had four hours in which to dispose of the body before rigor mortis (or something worse) set in. She was just formulating her plan when the ecstasy from Fang's blood hit her system and Amy, who was not, as a rule, a perky person, found herself grinning at the corpse on the table and feeling for it something that bordered on affection. It was as though the Happy Faerie of Bunnies and Candy had whacked her hard across the back of the head and she now saw the world as a glorious place full of infinite potential, love and shiny things.

\* \* \*

Bradley smacked his head on the safety bar, the way he did every time he rode the bus. It was one of the many downsides to being remarkably tall that nothing fit him—not clothes, not buses, not architecture. It irked him that he shared this quality with his father, a proud man who never apologized for his height. Ed was proud of many things, but chief among them was his career playing college "b-ball." Brad hated the way his father said that word: "b-ball." On some level he blamed his father for the excruciating growing pains he'd endured in early adolescence. (The ache in his bones was so intense that twice he woke up weeping.) He blamed his father for the fact that he was never able to fade into the background. (He was so tall that people stared.) He told himself that it was to camouflage his size that he'd first started wearing all black. (He meant to make himself disappear.) He wondered what dead-old-dad would think of that one.

Bradley's efforts to bypass The Bank's bouncer went over just about as well as they did every night.

"Whoa there, big guy, I need to see some ID."

"Why do you do this to me, man?" Bradley fussed. "You know me, Tommy. You've seen my ID a hundred times."

"Because I love to hear you whine, Nancy boy," Tommy said. "Now, lemme see your pretty picture."



Bradley flashed his license at the bouncer who first scowled then decided Bradley wasn't worth it and waved him in.

Inside the main toom, Bradley stopped and let his eyes adjust to the dark. His pale blue peepers weren't particularly keen at night and more than once he'd cracked his skull on the series of low arches that surrounded the dance floor and semi-private booths. Bradley would not risk embarrassing himself again and so he stood absolutely still until the arches at last began to separate themselves from the darkness and he could have a proper look around.

Where is she? Bradley wondered, half-panicked. Oh, God. What if she doesn't show? In the six weeks since she'd finished his ad seeking a "single Vampyre lady, no posers!" he had considered a myriad of disappointing scenarios. He had considered the fact that he might not be attracted to her, for instance. Or, that she might not be attracted to him. That she might be fat. That she might be dull. That she might be a narc. That she might have a lazy eye. He had even considered the very real possibility that she might have been born a dude. It had never occurred to him, however, to entertain the possibility that she might not show. That was just too grim to bear.

Then he spotted her. She was sitting in the second of three booths with the curtain drawn open just so. She was smiling at him. She was smiling at everyone. Bradley raised his chin in her direction and gave a deliberately casual mini-nod before heading over. Be cool, Bradley, he told himself. For once in your life, please be cool.

• • •

Amy was at the same time acutely aware of the fact that she was losing her shit, and completely unmotivated to do anything to stop it. She had cottonmouth. She was impressed with the strength of her own jaw. She wanted a clove cigarette. She liked the music they were playing. She wondered if the cute boy headed in her direction was the one she'd met on the Internet. She looked at the dead man, stripped to the waist and propped up on the other side of the booth and she was glad he couldn't talk. She didn't want to think about the dead man anymore. She thought she would like to touch the cute boy's hair. In fact, she'd like to put conditioner on it for him. His hair was

nice but it looked dry. When he gets to the table, she decided, I will ask him for a glass of water and a clove cigarette and I will suggest a cream conditioner. Or a hot oil treatment for shine... Oh, look. That girl has glitter on her nose. Glitter, glitter, glitter...

"Amy?" Bradley automatically extended his hand to shake.

"Glitter, glitter, glitter!" Amy giggled to herself.

"Sorry?" His hand was still extended. He already felt like an ass.

"Oh! Hello, CUTE BOY!" Amy looked up, surprised to see him. She motioned for Bradley to lean in and when he finally did, she took his face in both hands, looked him square in eye and whispered as though it were a very important secret, "Clove. Water. Conditioner."

For his part, Bradley was unsure how to respond. "You are Amy, aren't you?"

"I am," she said, releasing his head. "But do you think I should be? Because I've been giving a lot of thought recently to being someone else, you know?"

"Yes," he answered honestly. "Yes, I do." Bradley thought of being someone else every goddamned day. The directness of her question made him smile. This must be the girl, he thought.

"Sit!" she squeaked, scooting back to make him a place beside her.

"Thanks."

It wasn't until Bradley was actually sitting down next to Amy that he noticed the other fellow at the table—the shirtless fellow in the leather fetish mask. The table was large; it was made to seat ten and accommodate food for private functions, so it wasn't as if the fellow was crowding him, exactly. He certainly wasn't a voyeur — there were no eyeholes in his mask. And he wasn't likely to interrupt on account of the zipper where his mouth should have been. Still, he was sitting directly across from Bradley and he was shirtless. Four years into the scene, Bradley was still uncomfortable looking at man-nipples.

"Am I interrupting?" Bradley asked, gesturing to the man-nipples in question.

"Who, him?" Amy laughed hard. "No. No, no, no. Can't you smell that? He's—" she finished the sentence with a sound that might have been French or German or hocking up a loogie.

"Too much to drink?"

"No," she said, a little insulted. "The wall and the wet-vac got most of it, but I'll tell you what—I'm beginning to think

he was on something. I'm not sure if you can tell, but I am feeling a little peculiar..."

"You think he put something in your drink?" Bradley was horrified. Great, this is going well. Maybe someday we can tell our kids about how their mom was drugged and puked on by a leather freak on our very first date.

"He put something in my drink, all right," she said in a sing-song fashion. She didn't seem all that upset.

"Do you want me to... do something? Call the police or something?" he asked.

"Mercy, no!" Amy giggled. "I'm not that hungry."

• • •

The garlic mashed-potatoes had started repeating on Ed. His stomach was so sour, in fact, that he briefly considered the notion that his wife of thirty-five years had poisoned him. Of course, what would have been the point in that when this ridiculous stunt she'd put him up to was far, far worse?

"I'm going to need to see some ID please, sir." The bouncer stopped him at the door.

"Oh, you've got to be fucking kidding me," Ed protested. Tommy took a good look at Ed and thought, Who's kidding who, asshole? Ed fished out his ID and Tommy waved him through.

• • •

"A glass of water and a Guinness," Bradley ordered from a woman in a corset behind the bar. Just my fucking luck, he thought, contemplating the ethics of his situation. He really didn't want to be one of those guys, but he was a guy after all. It wasn't like he'd been the one to drug her—and anyway, she seemed to be enjoying it. Gah! What am I thinking? It wouldn't be right and he knew it. Not even if she begged him for it. Please God, he prayed, don't let her beg me for it.

"A glass of water and a Guinness," the lady in the corset repeated as she sat their drinks down. "I bet you get tired of people asking how tall you are, huh?"

"Yeah, sometimes," Bradley muttered, sliding his bills across the bar.

"So, how tall are you?" she asked anyway. "Six seven," he answered. Now she'll want to know if I play basketball.

"Think you're taller than that clown over there?"

Bradley turned to check out the clown

in question. He'd just walked in and he was standing perfectly still, letting his eyes adjust. If he wasn't Bradley's height, he was just under. He was thicker, though, with something of a middle-age paunch, a paunch he'd chosen to accentuate with a tight black razor-slash t-shirt. I have a shirt just like that, Bradley thought...

...Then Bradley dropped his beer.

• • •

Ed Boone's heart sank into the pit of his mashed-potato-filled belly. What the Hell had he been thinking? He couldn't see a damned thing. And he looked like a damned fool. He felt like a damned fool, too. He wasn't bonding with his son and he sure as shit wasn't "demonstrating acceptance"—he was invading the boy's territory and embarrassing him in front of his friends. Fathers and sons go through rough patches. It's natural. Ed and his old man couldn't stand each other for years. He didn't have to go putting on eyeliner to show his son he loved him. He decided he should leave.

Of course if he did leave, Carol would never let it go. She'd yammer on and on about how he was unwilling to walk a mile in his son's shoes, and how he was letting his personal biases destroy their family and yadda yadda yadda everything since Nixon was his fault because he'd been born with a dick. And she'd bring it all up in their session, too. Their therapist would nod while she yakked and then he'd turn to Ed and do that tut-tut thing with his mouth that made Ed want to punch him right in his permanently sour puss.

No. Enough was enough. For all her ridiculous ideas, Ed loved his wife. Loved her like he did in college and more so. He loved all the ways she'd aged and all the ways she hadn't. He hated that goddamned apartment and he missed sleeping next to his wife. He missed his son, too; missed the way things had been before. He and Bradley had been buddies once upon a time. He took the kid to movies, they played b-ball in the driveway. The two of them teamed up to tease Carol until she giggled like a little girl and hit them both with dishtowels.

If all he had to do to get that back was dress like a trick-or-treater and apologize to the boy, then goddamnit, he'd do it.

But first, he'd have another drink. One more drink, then he would get a move on.

• • •

"Do you have a car?" Bradley asked Amy. He had a crazed and desperate look in his eyes that might have been lust or terror.

"YES!" Amy answered enthusiastically, having a fondness for both. "Do you want to go to my car?"

"More than I have ever wanted anything in my life," Bradley spoke from the heart.

On their way out the door, Amy remembered Father Fang and checked her watch. She had never before noticed how much the face on her watch looked like an actual face—like the face of a tiny animal, living on her wrist. "Hello, little watch," she said. While waiting for her watch to answer, Amy forgot why she had checked it in the first place.

"C'mon," Bradley urged. Amy went.

• • •

"I'm here because I love my wife," Ed mumbled into his bourbon.

"Don't hear that very often," sighed Anne, the corseted barkeep.

"Beg pardon?" Ed didn't realize he'd been speaking aloud.

"Men don't often sit at bars drinking over how they love their wives, I mean."

"That's a damned shame," said Ed, and he downed the last of his Jack.

"Lucky number three?" offered Anne.

"I shouldn't."

"Oh come on, this one's on me," she said, pouring them each a shot. "To your wife," Anne raised her glass.

"To Carol," Ed raised his, "who gave me a kiss for luck." They drank. He couldn't put it off any longer.

"Seen a real tall, skinny kid in here?"

"Your boy?"

"Yeah."

"He was sitting with a little blonde and that sad sack of shit for a while," she said, indicating Fang, still slumped in the booth across the way. "The blonde traded Fang in for your boy, but it doesn't look like there's any hard feelings. Not sure where they went, but he might know."

"Thanks." Ed slipped off his stool and headed for the still-rosy corpse.

• • •

Amy drove—and lived in, it turned out—a pink VW Beetle. The car was outfitted with thick, retractable black curtains on every window and a license plate that read AMYSBUG.

No matter what kind of shine he tried to put on it, there was no avoiding the fact that AMYSBUG was not the ideal make-out vehicle for a boy of Bradley's size or demeanor. He hesitated, looked back at Tommy standing at the door to The Bank and recalled the horror that awaited him inside. He determined that he would make the pink car work. At least the flower in the dashboard vase was dead.

• • •

What exactly do you say to a half-naked man who's dead to the world and wearing a leather mask with a zipper where his mouth should be? Ed wondered. He decided to go with what he knew: guy talk.

"Hey there, buddy," he said, taking the seat formerly occupied by his son. "Don't mean to step on your good time, but I'm wondering if you might have seen a friend of mine?"

No answer.

"Buddy?"

Father Fang neither moved nor replied. Ed was contemplating his next move when he noticed Amy's hobo bag still on the seat beside him. Well, they couldn't have gone far, he thought. Maybe I could just wait?

Ed tapped his fingers on the table and tried to make himself comfortable.

• • •

Amy and Brad did their best with the seats down and the curtains pulled to make that car a love bug, but the romantic atmosphere was decidedly forced. Everything about Brad was pointy. Elbows and knees and other protuberances were sticking and poking and bumping into Amy and various crevasses in AMYSBUG in ways that neither of them found pleasant. To make matters worse, the ecstasy was working its way out of Amy's system and an insidious headache inching its way in.

They'd been oops-ing and ouch-ing for more than an hour when Bradley, ever optimistic, asked if she had a condom in the glove box?

"No," Amy snorted at the pun, wondering just how the Hell he thought that was going to work anyway. "But I might have one in my... wait a second—WHERE'S MY PURSE?" Amy had opened the car door with a key worn on a chain around her neck and thus had not

missed her purse. Missing it now, she rapidly began to freak out in that way that reasonable women do when they can't find their handbags.

"You probably left it in the club," Bradley answered, hoping all was not lost. "Do you want to run back and check?"

"No," Amy whined, looking at her watch. It was very late at night. Or very early, depending on your perspective. The sun would be making its way over the horizon at any moment.

"Fine... I'll go."

"No!"

Amy was tired and grumpy and thirsty and ready to be alone, but she couldn't let Bradley out of the car and the morning light in. That left only one option.

"Hey... are you sick or something?" Bradley asked.

Amy grabbed his shirt with both hands and growled as her flesh peeled back away from her expanding jaw and her teeth reached out in shards of wet and white. "YESSSSSS," she hissed. She was feeling ill indeed.

\* \* \*

Ed Boone had had a few and he didn't feel too well himself. He was just about through with staring at Fang. "Hey, buddy!" he shouted. "Hey, wake up, I'm talking to you!"

Father Fang didn't so much as twitch.

That's it, Ed thought, and he rose—all six and a half feet of him—and reached across the table to get the freak's attention.

Ed only had to lift up the corner of that mask to know that what was going on under there just... wasn't... right. He blanched, and for a moment he could neither move nor breathe.

*The blonde traded Fang in for your boy...*

Ed grabbed the hobo bag and sprinted toward the door. He was sober, sweating, and scared when he grabbed Tommy's shoulder and spun him around hard.

"Where did she go?" he demanded, shaking the bag in Tommy's face.

The bouncer wasn't as tall as Ed, but there was little doubt that Tommy had the advantage. He might have proved it, too, if not for the fact that the blonde chick who belonged to that giant bag had headed back to her car with the Nancy-boy and, judging by the way that thing was shaking, there was some pretty athletic action going on inside. The idea of the old man busting up their

party struck Tommy as a funny way to end the night. "Pink car," he said, and pointed.

Ed hauled ass for AMYSBUG.

\* \* \*

It's funny, the things you think about when you're fighting for your life. Bradley wondered what had ever become of his weights. He'd gotten a set for Christmas when he was 16—the year he'd asked for a bass guitar. He'd used them a couple of times and then, figuring they were a ploy on his folks' part to turn him into a jock, he quit. He put them out in the garage in a cardboard box. And just in case anyone missed the point, he got a big, black Sharpie and labeled the box "Shit I Do Not Want."

Bradley thought about the reset button he loved so much. If this were a game, he thought, I'd hit reset. The next time he played this game, he thought he might use the weights. He'd still rather have had the bass, but he'd use the weights. Definitely. Definitely should have used the weights.

Amy was too strong for him. His right arm gave out and she snapped in close to his face, her long thin tongue tickling his ear in a disappointing twist on how he'd hoped to spend his night. She cackled—which was fairly insulting—and drew back for the kill.

"Restoration is salvation," Bradley mouthed, and he closed his eyes tight.

"JESUS MOTHER OF FUCK, GET OFF MY BOY!" Ed shouted as he ripped into AMYSBUG, bringing the morning in with him.

Amy slammed up and back against the steering wheel like she'd been kicked. Bradley wriggled out and stared, horrified, as she died like an ant under a magnifying glass: there was some squirming, a little screaming, a touch of sizzle and then a lot of dust.

\* \* \*

Ed and Bradley Boone hugged that night. Standing in the morning sun, dressed in black, with eyeliner and mascara streaming down their faces, they held each other for longer than they had since Bradley was a child. Not all of their problems were solved in that embrace, but a few things—though unspoken—were made clear: Ed would be moving back into the family home; and they would

never speak of that night ever again, for as long as they lived.

There are very few rites of passage left to the American male, but up there with Bar Mitzvah, prom night, and the first time you get your ass kicked is the first time you see your dad puke booze. That night, Bradley Boone became a man. Several times. Every mile or so, the whole way home.

"Dad," Bradley asked, as they pulled up on the house, "do you remember where those weights are you got me for Christmas?"

"Yep," Ed chuckled softly. "They're in the garage, in a box marked 'Shit Bradley's Gonna Want Someday'."

\* \* \*

Anne, the bartender, peeled her sweaty corset off and took her first deep breath in twelve hours. Sure, the corset beat the pasties she had to wear when she used to sling drinks at the titty bar, but not by a Hell of a lot. And spooky kids didn't often tip like horny businessmen. Nor did they feel her up... usually.

"Wake up, you lazy sack of shit," she shouted at her ex, still masked and shirtless, slumped over in the booth where he'd been all night.

Anne would deny it to her best friends' faces, but she had a soft spot where Fang was concerned. Oh—she didn't trust him as far as she could throw him, but he wasn't bad in the sack. And she liked it when he used to stay over. He cooked for her. Who doesn't love a man who can cook? She wouldn't loan him five dollars to catch a cab, but... they were the only ones left in the place. Why not?

Anne straddled Fang's lap and ran her long fingernails over his bare chest.

"Faaaang," she whispered. "Daddy wanna play?"

Anne forced her sizeable breasts into Fang's face as she reached back to untie the leather mask.

"You remember our deal," she chided him. "You don't bite, and I don't fight, okay?"

Fang smiled as he reached up and unzipped his mouth.

"Go ahead," he said. "Fight."

End.



# THE COLDEST OF SCANS

COLDKILLER-DCP





DCP SENDS IT'S SYMPATHY AND PRAYERS TD THE  
VICTIMS DF THE EARTHQUAKE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



WHEN TOMORROW STARTS WITHOUT ME  
AND I'M NOT THERE TO SEE  
IF THE SUN SHOULD RISE AND FIND YOUR EYES  
ALL FILLED WITH TEARS FOR ME.

I WISH SO MUCH YOU WOULDN'T CRY  
THE WAY YOU DID TODAY,  
WHILE THINKING OF THE MANY THINGS  
WE DIDN'T GET TO SAY.

I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU LOVE ME  
AS MUCH AS I LOVE YOU,  
AND EACH TIME THAT YOU THINK OF ME  
I KNOW YOU'LL MISS ME TOO.

BUT WHEN TOMORROW STARTS WITHOUT ME  
PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND,  
THAT AN ANGEL CAME AND CALLED MY NAME,  
AND TOOK ME BY THE HAND.

AND SAID MY PLACE WAS READY,  
IN HEAVEN FAR ABOVE,  
AND THAT I'D HAVE TO LEAVE BEHIND,  
ALL THOSE I DEARLY LOVEO.

BUT WHEN I WALKEO THOUGH HEAVEN'S GATES,  
I FELT SO MUCH AT HOME,  
WHEN GOD LOOKEO DOWN AND SMILED AT ME,  
FROM HIS GREAT GOLDEN THRONE.

HE SAID " THIS IS ETERNITY,  
AND ALL I PROMISED YOU,"  
TODAY FOR LIFE ON EARTH IS PAST,  
BUT HERE IT STARTS ANEW.

I PROMISE NO TOMORROW,  
FOR TODAY WILL ALWAYS LAST,  
AND SINCE EACH DAY'S THE SAME WAY,  
THERE'S NO LONGING FOR THE PAST.

SO WHEN TOMORROW STARTS WITHOUT ME,  
DON'T THINK WE'RE FAR APART,  
FOR EVERY TIME YOU THINK OF ME,  
I'M RIGHT THERE IN YOUR HEART.